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# LUCKY STRIKE





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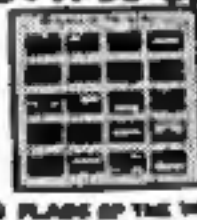
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# LUCKY STRIKE

IN THE EARLY SUMMER OF 1944, THE RAIL BRIDGE ACROSS THE RIVER COLLENO SEEMED OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE. BUT WITH THE ALLIES CLAWING THEIR WAY UP THE ITALIAN PENINSULAR, EVEN A MINOR RIVER CROSSING WAS STRATEGICALLY IMPORTANT.



IT WAS ONLY A SMALL BRIDGE, SEEMINGLY HARDLY WORTH THE TROUBLE TO DESTROY. BUT IN WARTIME, SMALL THINGS CAN HAVE UNEXPECTED RESULTS.



# Chapter 1. THE PATROL

AT AN AIRFIELD TOWARDS THE TOE OF ITALY PILOT OFFICER CONNOR AND HIS CREW WERE BEING BRIEFED FOR THEIR MISSION.



I THINK THAT IS CLEAR ENOUGH. INTELLIGENCE REPORTS THE COLLENO BRIDGE HAS BEEN REPAIRED. YOU ARE TO UNDO THEIR WORK AS YOU HAVE BEFORE. GOOD LUCK AND HAPPY LANDINGS.

IT WAS A BRIEFING RECEIVED WITH MIXED FEELINGS BY THE CREW OF G FOR GEORGE.

THE COLLENO BRIDGE HAD COME TO BE HATED BY THE CREW. NOT BECAUSE THEY WERE COWARDS BUT BECAUSE THEY WERE YOUNG AND CRAVED EXCITEMENT AND ACTION. FOR THEM, THE BRIDGE MEANT NOTHING.

THIS IS STUPID! WE KNOCK IT DOWN AND THEY BUILD IT UP AGAIN! WHAT GOOD DOES IT DO?

MAYBE I COULD TRANSFER TO A MORE ACTIVE SQUADRON. THEN, AT LEAST, I MIGHT SEE SOME REAL ACTION.



AND THEY CANCELLED MY LEAVE FOR THIS!



PILOT OFFICER CONNOR LISTENED TO THE REMARKS WITH A WRY SMILE. HE WAS OLDER THAN HIS CREW, SOMETIMES HE THOUGHT HE WAS TOO OLD, TOO OUT OF TOUCH.

THE MILK RUN AGAIN! AREN'T WE EVER GOING TO DO ANYTHING USEFUL IN THIS WAR?

WHAT'S THE MATTER, SAM? DON'T YOU WANT TO DIE OF OLD AGE?



FOUR TIMES NOW THEY HAD BOMBED THE BRIDGE AND EACH TIME THE GERMANS HAD REPAIRED IT.

ME? I JUST WANT SOME MEDALS, SKIPPER, FOR MY KIDS TO PLAY WITH AFTER THIS LOT'S OVER.



THEY'D APPRECIATE HAVING YOU TO PLAY WITH A LOT MORE. LET'S GET MOVING.

PILOT OFFICER CONNOR SEATED HIMSELF BEHIND THE FAMILIAR CONTROLS OF THE HALIFAX BOMBER AND MADE HIS FINAL FLIGHT CHECK...



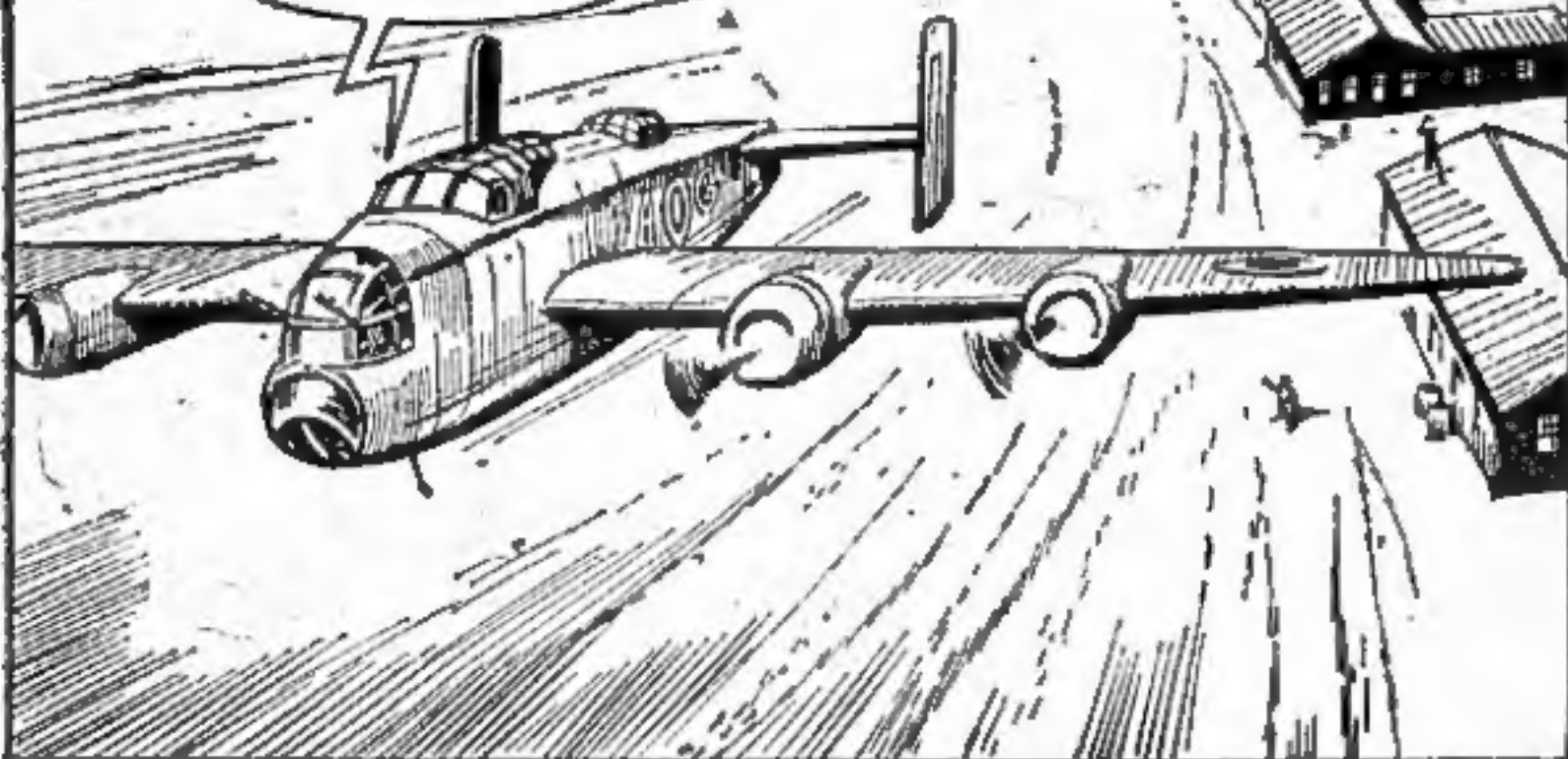
ALL SECURE? CHECK STATIONS READY FOR TAKE-OFF!



# Lucky Strike

ITS FOUR ENGINES THUNDERING AT PEAK REVOLUTIONS, THE GIANT BOMBER SOARED INTO THE AIR.

NAVIGATOR TO  
SKIPPER. STEER  
COURSE ZERO-  
EIGHT-THREE...



SLOWLY THE BOMBER'S NOSE TURNED TOWARDS THE NORTH...TOWARDS THE ENEMY AND THE SMALL, INSIGNIFICANT COLLENO BRIDGE.



A ROUTINE MISSION, WITHOUT INTEREST TO THOSE WHO FLEW IT... BUT ONE WHICH WAS TO TOUCH THE LIVES OF THOSE OVER WHOM IT FLEW.



## Chapter 2. SUICIDE MISSION

MONTHS OF BITTER FIGHTING HAD FOSTERED A HATRED OF THE AIR IN SERGEANT LISTER, GRIZZLED INFANTRY N.C.O. IT WAS FROM THE AIR THAT ENEMY PLANES SWEEPED IN WITHOUT WARNING TO BUTCHER HIS MEN WITH THEIR MACHINE-GUNS AND FRAGMENTATION BOMBS.



IT WAS ENEMY AIRCRAFT AND GUN BATTERIES SET DEEP IN THE HILLS THAT WERE DISRUPTING ALLIED SUPPLY LINES.

GOOD! RAISE ELEVATION ONE DEGREE AND WE SHALL HAVE THEM!

JA, HERR LEUTNANT.





# Lucky Strike

A GERMAN FORWARD ARTILLERY OBSERVATION POST COMMANDING THE SUPPLY ROUTE WAS DIRECTING DEVASTATING FIRE ON THE ALLIED CONVOYS CARRYING GUNS, MEN AND AMMUNITION.



A MERE TRICKLE OF VITAL SUPPLIES WAS GETTING THROUGH. CAPTAIN EVANS, COMMANDING A COMPANY OF INFANTRY HOLDING THAT SECTOR OF THE LINE, CALLED FOR VOLUNTEERS TO FORM A PATROL TO DESTROY THE OBSERVATION POST. SERGEANT LISTER WAS THE FIRST TO STEP FORWARD.

THIS IS A DANGEROUS ASSIGNMENT, SERGEANT, BUT THAT ENEMY O.P. MUST BE WIPED OUT. ARE YOU SURE ---

I'M FIT ENOUGH, SR! ANYWAY, I'M USED TO THIS KIND OF JOB.





CAPTAIN EVANS HESITATED MOMENTARILY-- BUT LISTER WAS AN EFFICIENT N.C.O., EVEN IF HE HAD BEEN ACTING ODDLY AT TIMES. QUICKLY, THE OFFICER BRIEFED HIM ON THE POSITION.

AS YOU KNOW, SERGEANT, I HAVEN'T AN OFFICER AVAILABLE TO LEAD THE PATROL--AND IT'S NOT GOING TO BE EASY. THE POST IS PROBABLY RINGED WITH MACHINE-GUNS.



I UNDERSTAND, SIR. YOU CAN LEAVE IT TO ME.

IT WAS, AS MAJOR ARMWRIGHT, THE ADJUTANT, WELL KNEW, A SUICIDE MISSION. HE STOOD CLOSE TO EVANS AS THE PATROL MOVED OUT INTO THE NIGHT.

LISTER, AGAIN? WHY DOES HE VOLUNTEER FOR EVERY DANGEROUS SCHEME WE HAVE?

NO IDEA, SR. PROBABLY TRYING TO PROVE SOMETHING TO HIMSELF.



LISTER GRIMACED AS HE HEARD THE WHISPERED COMMENTS BEHIND HIM.

WHAT'S THE IDEA SENDING US OUT WITHOUT AN OFFICER?

THE SARGE IS AS GOOD AS ANY OFFICER, MATE. HE'LL GEE US THROUGH.

QUIET, BACK THERE. YOU WANT TO TELL JERRY WE'RE COMING?





THE NIGHT WAS DARK AND OPPRESSIVE WITH FEAR. SOMEWHERE, IN THE HILLS BEFORE THEM, ENEMY EYES SEARCHED THE DARKNESS. ENEMY FINGERS GRIPPED THE TRIGGERS OF DEADLY SPANDAUS. DEATH HOVERED IN THAT DARKNESS.

NOT A THING TO BE SEEN. WOULD AN OFFICER BE ABLE TO SEE ANY BETTER? WOULD A SET OF PIPS MAKE ME ANY BETTER THAN I AM?



IT WAS A WOUND LISTER CARRIED DEEP INSIDE HIM. HE WAS A GOOD SOLDIER BUT WAS HE AS GOOD AS HE THOUGHT? WAS THE KEEN EDGE OF THE VETERAN BECOMING BLUNTED BY THE LONG, HARD CAMPAIGN?

STAY HERE UNTIL I GET BACK. I'M GOING TO FIND OUT WHERE JERRY IS BEFORE HE FINDS US.





LISTER MAY HAVE DOUBTED HIMSELF BUT THE MEN WHO KNEW HIM DID NOT. ONE SUCH WAS CORPORAL WILLIAMS, ALWAYS QUICK TO LEAP TO THE SERGEANT'S DEFENCE.

WHAT IF HE DON'T COME BACK? DO WE SIT HERE LIKE CLAY PIGEONS? STRIKES ME LISTER THINKS TOO MUCH OF HIMSELF.

AW! PIPE DOWN, JACKSON -- THINK YOURSELF LUCKY YOU'VE GOT A SERGEANT WHO'LL NOT SEND YOU TO DO A JOB HE CAN'T DO HIMSELF.



LISTER DID NOT NEED ANYONE TO DEFEND HIM. CROUCHED IN THE NIGHT, HE FROZE AS CULTURAL WORDS IN GERMAN FELL ON HIS EARS.

WAS IST DAS?

RELAX, HERE H, IT IS NOTHING. THE ENGLANDERS ARE FAR AWAY.





HE WAS WRONG. THE ENGLISH  
WERE VERY CLOSE INDEED.



LISTER WAS QUICK AND DEADLY IN  
SWIFT SUCCESSION THE GERMANS  
WERE SILENCED.



DAWN WAS BREAKING AS LISTER MOVED HIS MEN FORWARD FOR THE KILL.  
A GREY LIGHT SOFTENED DETAILS BUT NOTHING COULD SOFTEN THE  
FACT THAT DEATH WAS THEIR COMPANION.

YOU KNOW WHAT TO  
DO. FAN OUT, FIND  
THE JERRIES AND  
GIVE IT TO 'EM!  
MAKE IT QUICK --  
BUT MAKE IT  
GOOD!

WHERE  
WILL YOU BE,  
SARGE?





IMPATIENCE SHARPENED LISTER'S VOICE AS HE SNAPPED AT THE QUESTIONER.

I'M HEADING STRAIGHT FOR THE OBSERVATION POST WITH CORPORAL WILLIAMS. MEET US THERE WHEN YOU'VE DONE YOUR JOB. RIGHT. LET'S MOVE!



IT WAS CLOSE-QUARTER FIGHTING WITH NO MERCY GIVEN OR EXPECTED. THE PEACEFUL DAWN BECAME HIDEOUS WITH THE SCREAMS OF MEN, THE SAVAGE CHATTER OF GUNS, THE EPITEFUL BLAST OF GRENADES.





RECOVERING FROM THEIR INITIAL SURPRISE, THE ENEMY BEGAN TO FIGHT BACK AT THE BRITISH WHO STRUCK OUT OF THE GREY LIGHT OF DAWN.



IN THE FARMHOUSE THAT HOUSED THE OBSERVATION POST, THE SOUND OF THE ATTACK JERKED A SLEEPY OFFICER FROM HIS BUNK. EVEN AS HIS FEET HIT THE FLOOR, THE DOOR SLAMMED OPEN.





THERE WAS A SECOND OF FROZEN IMMOBILITY WHEN TIME STOOD STILL AS THE TWO FORCES MET. LISTER, FINGER TREMBLING ON THE TRIGGER OF HIS TOMMY-GUN, BARKED A HARSH COMMAND...

HANDS UP!



IT WAS NOTHING LESS THAN SUICIDE TO ARGUE WITH A TOMMY-GUN AT THAT RANGE... BUT THAT WAS WHAT THE GERMAN OFFICER DID. THE LINGER IN HIS HAND HAD NOT EVEN COME TO THE AIM WHEN LISTER SQUEEZED THE TRIGGER

YOU DARNED FOOLS! TAKE IT, THEN!





THE ATTACK WAS OVER AND THE BRITISH WERE IN COMMAND OF THE OBSERVATION POST. BUT NOT WITHOUT LOSS. TWO HAD DIED AND THREE WERE WOUNDED.

WHAT NOW, SARGE?

WE RETIRE ACCORDING TO PLAN, CORPORAL. YOU GO AHEAD AND TELL CAPTAIN EVANS THE POST IS OURS. HE'LL KNOW WHAT TO DO.



WILLIAMS HESITATED. HE COULD MAKE THE RETURN JOURNEY SAFELY BUT HE WAS NOT SO SURE THAT LATER, HAMPERED WITH WOUNDED, COULD DO THE SAME.

DON'T ARGUE, CORPORAL. YOUR JOB IS TO GET BACK AND TELL THE CAPTAIN. NOW GET MOVING AND STOP WASTING TIME!



THE SERGEANT'S VOICE WAS QUIET—THE VOICE OF A MAN AT PEACE WITH HIMSELF. AGAIN HE HAD PROVED HIMSELF. PERHAPS, IN A FEW DAYS, THE DOUBTS WOULD START AGAIN BUT AT THE MOMENT HE FELT FINE, CONFIDENT THAT HE COULD TACKLE WHATEVER LAY AHEAD.

WE STAND A CHANCE IF NO JERRY HAS SPOTTED US. IF HE HAS AND CALLS UP REINFORCEMENTS— THEN WE'LL HAVE A FIGHT ON OUR HANDS, A MECK OF A FIGHT!





THE BEAT OF ENGINES CARRIED TO LISTER'S EARS AND HE STARED SKYWARDS, SEARCHING FOR THE SOURCE OF THE NOISE. HE SIGHED IRRITABLY AS HE RECOGNISED THE PLANE AS BRITISH.

THEY DON'T KNOW THERE'S A WAR ON. LONG-DISTANCE KILLERS, THAT'S ALL THEY ARE. WHAT GOOD DO THEY DO?



IT WAS G FOR GEORGE ON ITS WAY TO BOMB THE COLLEND BRIDGE.



UNKNOWN TO LISTER, OTHER EYES WERE WATCHING THE SCENE. HIGH UP THE WINDING MOUNTAIN ROAD, A GERMAN DESPATCH RIDER HAD HALTED HIS MACHINE AND WAS STARING WITH GOGGLING EYES.

HIMMEL! THE ENGLANDERS HAVE TAKEN THE POST!



THE GERMAN COMMANDANT HAD FAILED TO MAKE HIS ROUTINE CONTACT. THE DESPATCH RIDER HAD BEEN SENT TO INVESTIGATE. NOW HE RALLIED AWAY ON HIS MACHINE TO SUMMON A FORCE TO WIPE OUT THE BRITISH PATROL.



LISTER HAD NOT SEEN THE ENEMY DESPATCH RIDER BUT REAR-GUNNER EDWARDS HAD. SITTING BEHIND HIS GUNS, HE STARED MUDDILY AT THE GROUND DRIFTING BY BENEATH HIM.





PILOT OFFICER CONNOR, ALERT TO ANY POSSIBLE DANGER, SCANNED THE SKY AT ONCE.



CONNOR RELAXED. A SINGLE ENEMY SOLDIER ON THE GROUND WAS NOT IMPORTANT. AND HE HAD OTHER THINGS ON HIS MIND.

A LONE DESPATCH RIDER HE WON'T GIVE US ANY TROUBLE DOWN THERE IT'S THE ENGINE I'M WORRIED ABOUT. STARBOARD INNER SOUNDS A LITTLE ROUGH...



THE BOMBER DIPPED AND VEERED. ON THE GROUND BELOW, THE GERMAN BLANCHED AS THE ROAR OF ENGINES ECHOED FROM THE HILLS AROUND HIM WISTFULLY. EDWARDUS ALIGNED HIS GUNS ON THE MOVING TARGET.

I BET I COULD GET HIM. I JUST BET I COULD.

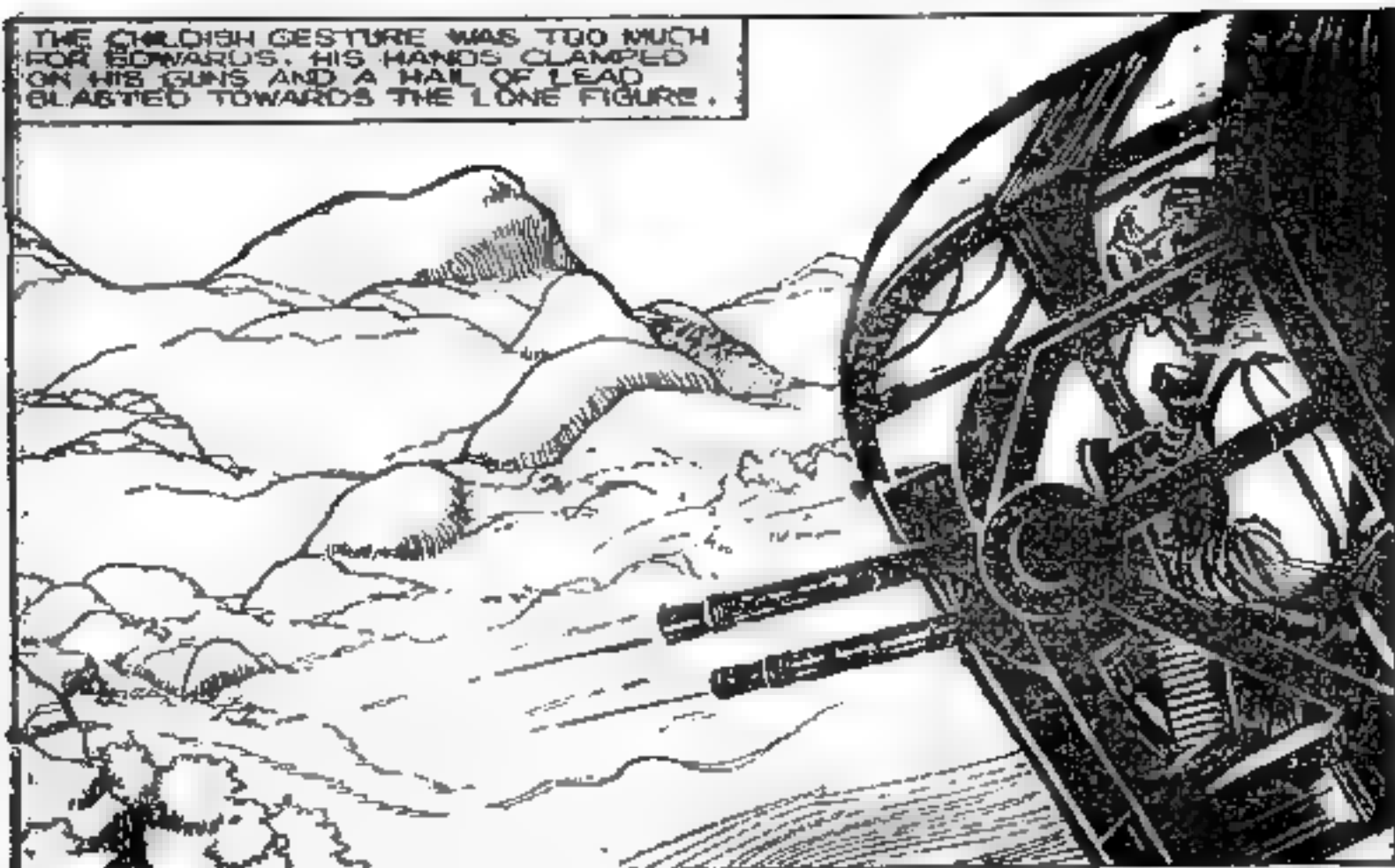




THE BOMBER ROARED OVERHEAD  
AND THE GERMAN GLARED  
UPWARDS WITH HATRED.



THE CHILDISH GESTURE WAS TOO MUCH  
FOR EDWARDUS. HIS HANDS CLAMPED  
ON HIS GUNS AND A HAIL OF LEAD  
BLASTED TOWARDS THE LONE FIGURE.



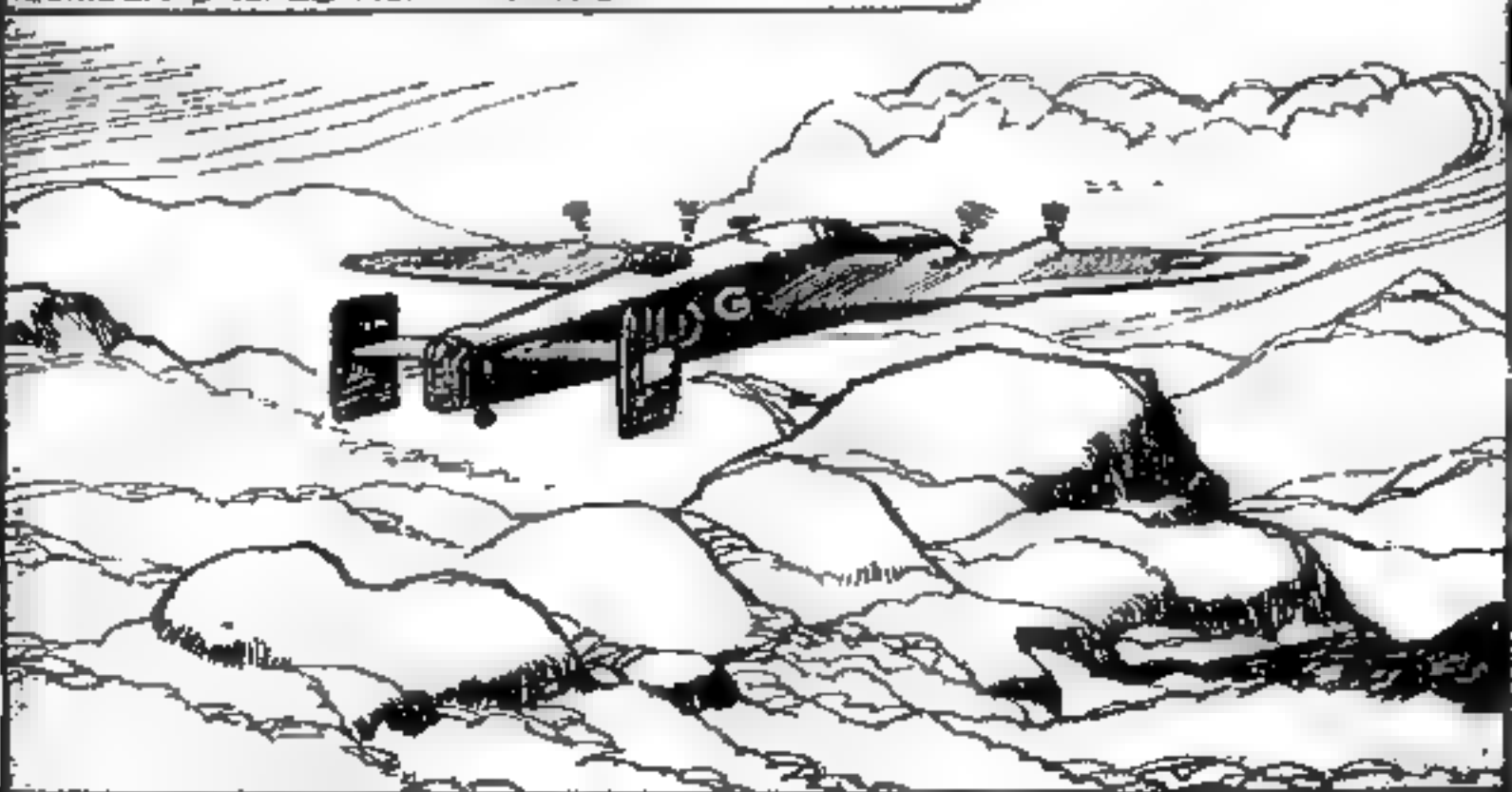


EDWARDS DID NOT MISS. THE RIPPING HAIL OF LEAD TORE DUST FROM THE ROAD, SMASHING INTO THE MOTOR-CYCLE AND ITS RIDER, GAINING FOR LISTER'S PATROL THE VITAL TIME NEEDED FOR ESCAPE.

AAARGH!



LISTER NEVER KNEW HOW IT WAS THAT HE AND HIS MEN ESCAPED DESTRUCTION, JUST AS EDWARDS NEVER KNEW HOW IMPORTANT HIS BURST OF FIRE HAD BEEN. YAWNING, THE REAR-GUNNER SETTLED BACK AS THE BOMBER DRONE NORTHWARDS.





## Chapter 3.

## THE TRIAL

LONG BEFORE THE ALLIES HAD INVADED ITALY, HAUPTMANN CARL HICHMANN HAD RECEIVED HIS BAPTISM OF FIRE. ON MANY BATTLEFIELDS HE HAD PROVED HIS COURAGE... COURAGE WHICH DID NOT GO UNREWARDED.

HAUPTMANN CARL HICHMANN-- YOU HAVE EARNED THE HIGHEST AWARD OF THE THIRD REICH. FIGHT WELL FOR THE FATHERLAND AND SEE THAT YOU DO NOT DISHONOUR IT.

IT WAS A PROUD MOMENT FOR HIS FATHER, GENERAL HICHMANN, WHO HAD BEEN HIS SHARE OF WAR.

SUCH A SHORT LEAVE. TOMORROW YOU ARE OFF AGAIN-- THIS TIME TO ITALY. WHEN SHALL I SEE YOU AGAIN, CARL?

VERY SOON, FATHER. NOTHING CAN WITHSTAND THE POWER OF THE THIRD REICH. WE SHALL SWEEP THE BRITISH INTO THE SEA.



GENERAL HICMANN WAS NOT SO CERTAIN. HE HAD FOUGHT IN TWO WARS AND HAD KNOWN THE BITTERNESS OF DEFEAT. HE HAD A GREAT RESPECT FOR THE BRITISH.

DO NOT UNDER ESTIMATE THE ENEMY, CARL. THE ENGLISH ARE TOUGH FIGHTERS. YOU MUST BE STRONG, RUTHLESS, WITHOUT FEAR AND YET NOT WITHOUT RESPECT.



CARL WAS PUZZLED. HOW COULD ANYONE HAVE RESPECT FOR THE ENEMIES OF THE THIRD REICH?

YOU ARE A SOLDIER, CARL, AND YOU KNOW OUR TRADITIONS. THERE IS NO GLORY IN DEFEATING A HELPLESS ENEMY THERE IS NO SHAME IN RESPECTING A STRONG ONE. THERE IS ONLY SHAME IN---  
**COWARDICE!**



LATER, SITTING IN THE TRAIN ON HIS WAY TO THE ITALIAN FRONT, HE THOUGHT ABOUT HIS FATHER'S WORDS. HE, A COWARD - THE THOUGHT WAS RIDICULOUS!

THE OLD MAN MUST BE GETTING CHILDISH. SURELY HE DOES NOT THINK THAT I COULD POSSIBLY BECOME A COWARD AFTER ALL THAT I HAVE BEEN THROUGH? IT IS RIDICULOUS!





AT THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE SECTOR TO WHICH CARL HAD BEEN ASSIGNED, OBERST FELTSHEN LISTENED TO THE RAVING OF GENERAL OBRVOLT OF THE DREADED S.S.

WE MUST HAVE VICTORIES, HERR OBERST, NOT EXCUSES! THE THIRD REICH DEMANDS VICTORIES!

FOR VICTORIES, HERR GENERAL, WE NEED MEN----

THE S.S. MAN DID NOT EVEN GIVE THE WEHRMACHT OFFICER TIME TO FINISH HIS SENTENCE.

MEN! MEN! YOU HAVE MEN! WHAT YOU NEED IS COURAGE! YOU MUST ATTACK—ATTACK, DO YOU HEAR? ATTACK UNTIL THE CURSED BRITISH ARE GROUND INTO THE DIRT!



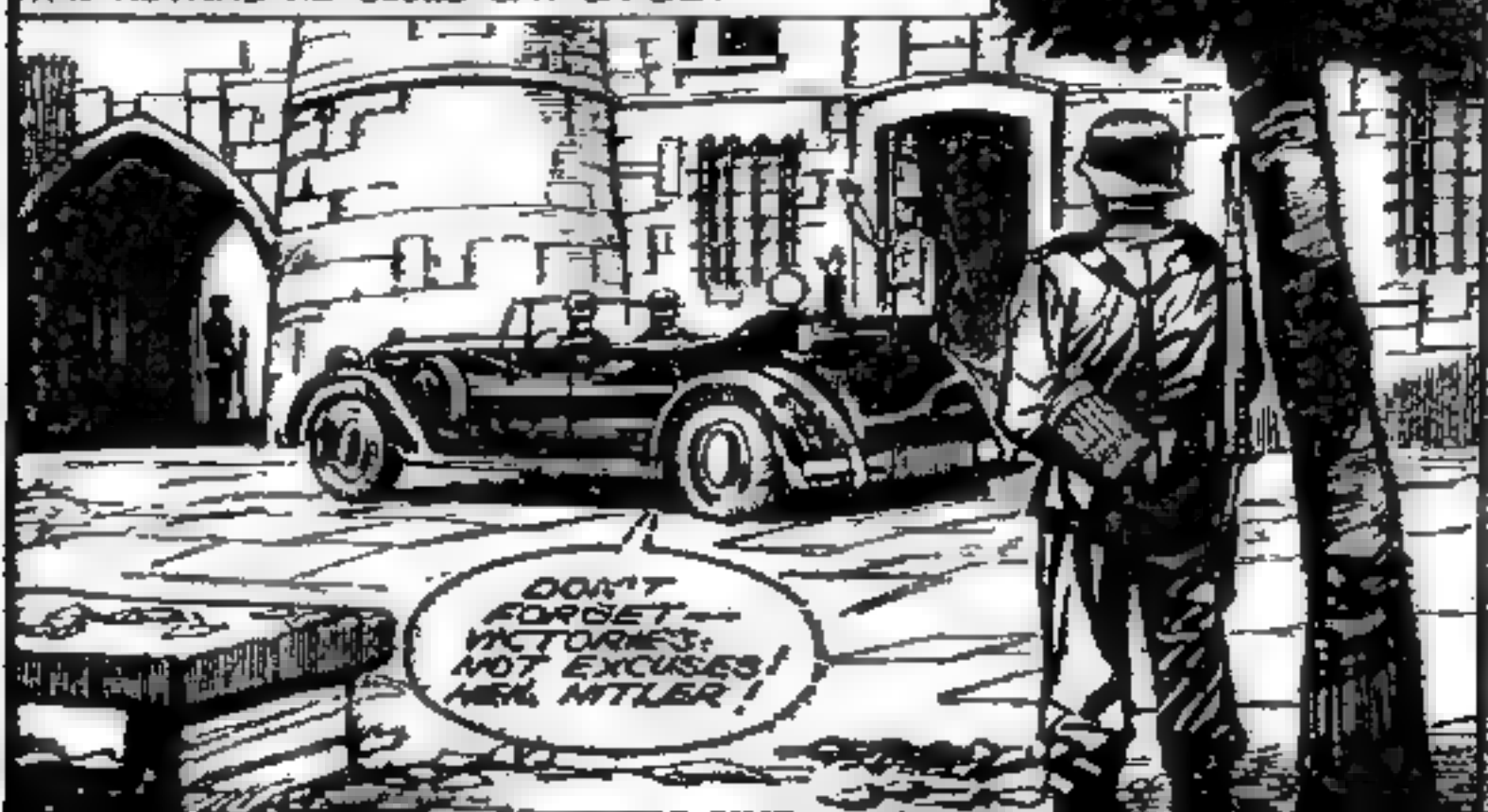
FELTSHEN STEFFENED. NOT EVEN THE ALL-POWERFUL S.S. COULD ACCUSE HIM OF COWARDICE.

PERHAPS THE GENERAL WOULD CARE TO DIRECT THE ATTACK HIMSELF?

NO --- NO, I AM NEEDED ELSEWHERE. I WILL BE GONE SEVERAL DAYS WHEN I RETURN I EXPECT TO HEAR OF VICTORIES -- NOT DEFEATS. YOU WILL SEE TO IT!

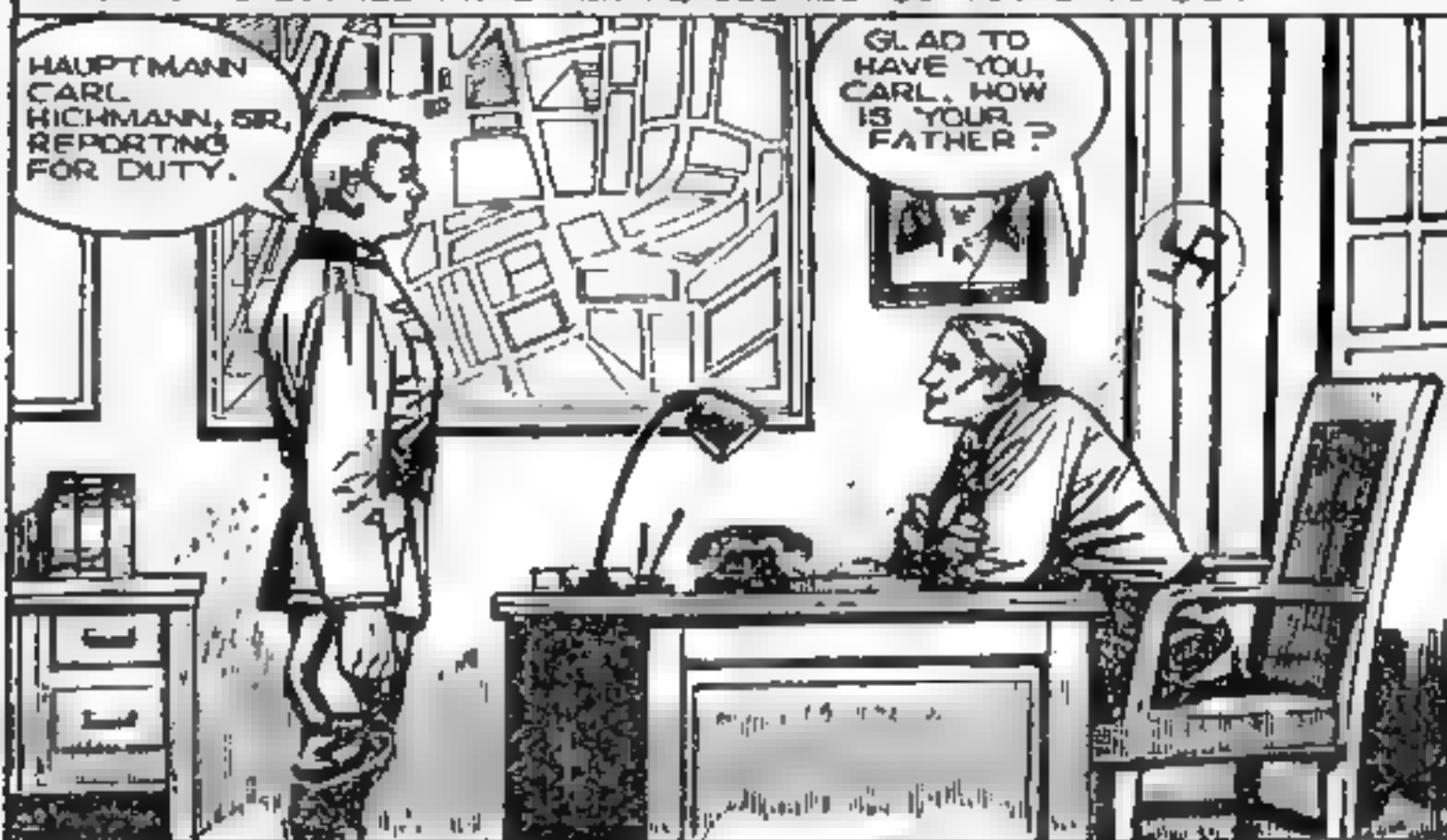


FELTSHEN COULD SENSE THE WEAKNESS BENEATH THE ARROGANCE OF THE GENERAL -- BUT THERE WAS NOTHING HE COULD SAY OR DO.





THERE WAS NO QUESTIONING OR BROOKING THE ORDERS OF AN S S GENERAL. AN ATTACK MUST BE LAUNCHED. FELTSHEN FELT A TOUCH OF PITY AS HE LOOKED AT CARL. HE SEEMED SO YOUNG TO DIE.



OBERST FELTSHEN AND GENERAL HICHMANN WERE OLD FRIENDS CHILDLESS HIMSELF, THE OBERST HAD ENVIED HICHMANN HIS SON, BUT NOT NOW

WELL, HERR OBERST. HE SENDS YOU HIS REGARDS.

ENOUGH OF OLD MAN'S TALK, FM YOU ARE EAGER TO WIN MORE GLORY. WELL, YOU WILL NOT HAVE TO WAIT LONG. PERHAPS YOU WILL EVEN WIN ANOTHER IRON CROSS.





CARL HAD ALL THE CONFIDENCE OF ONE WHO BELONGED TO THE MASTER RACE. HE FOLLOWED INTENTLY AS FELTSHEN EXPLAINED THE SITUATION.



FELTSHEN SMILED GRIMLY. THIS YOUNG MAN HAD STILL MUCH TO LEARN.





DIE...YES, BUT IT WAS NOT ALWAYS A CLEAN DEATH. A MAN COULD BE RIPPED AND TORN AND STILL RETAIN A MOCKERY OF LIFE. THIS YOUNG MAN, SO STRONG, SO PROUD -- WHAT COULD HAPPEN TO HIM? BUT SENTIMENT HAS NO PLACE IN WAR.



THE TRANSPORT  
IS WAITING,  
HERR OBERST.

VERY GOOD, FELDWEBEL  
VOGEL. YOU WILL LEAVE  
IMMEDIATELY, CARL.

FELDWEBEL VOGEL WAS A VETERAN, YET THERE WAS SOMETHING STRANGE ABOUT MR. CARL. THOUGHT HE ACTED AS IF UNDER SUPREME TENSION.



HAVE  
YOU BEEN  
HERE LONG,  
FELDWEBEL?

TOO  
LONG, HERR  
HALETHANN.  
BEARING YOUR  
PARDON.



REMEMBERING WHAT FELTSHEN HAD SAID ABOUT LOWERED MORALE, CARL QUESTIONED THE FELDWEBEL.



CARL STIFFENED AT THE NOTE OF HYSTERIA IN THE FELDWEBEL'S VOICE. SUCH EMOTION WAS DANGEROUS. IT HAD TO BE STOPPED AT ONCE.



CARL RELAXED. NOW HE COULD HEAR A MUTED THUNDER, THE ROARING PULSE OF DISTANT GUNS, AND HIS BLOOD THRILLED TO THE SOUND. HE WOULD SHOW VOGEL AND OBERST FELTSHEN JUST HOW DANGEROUS THE BRITISH WERE.

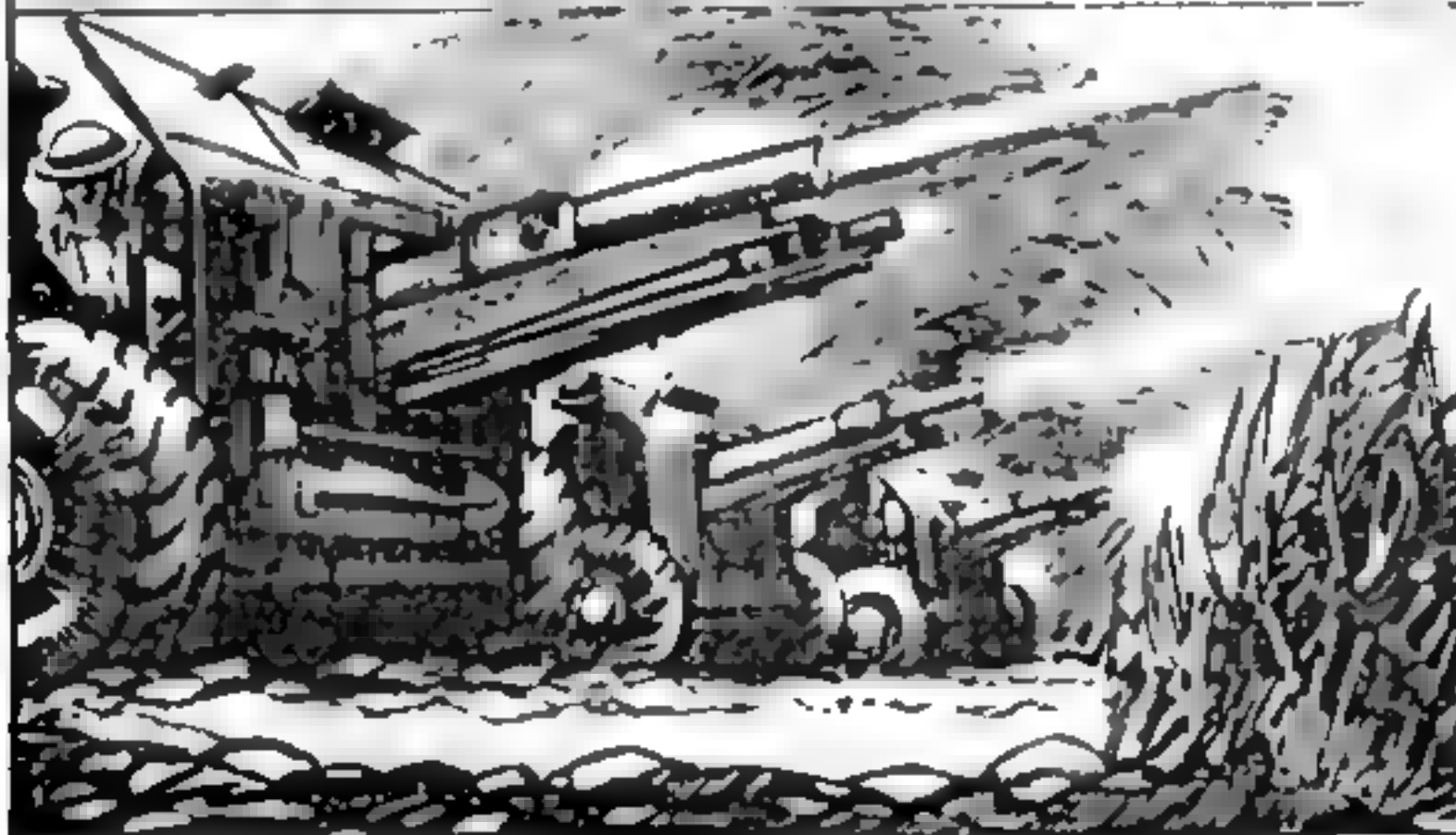




DEEP BEHIND THE ALLIED LINES, MAX WATERS, IN COMMAND OF A BATTERY OF 24 POUNDERS, SHOUTED HIS COMMAND THE OFFENSIVE AGAINST THE GERMAN LINES HAD BEGUN.



GIRLS SCREAMED TOWARDS THE SKY DRIVEN BY THE FURY OF EXPLODING COORDS. THE ROAR OF GUNS SHOOK THE EARTH.

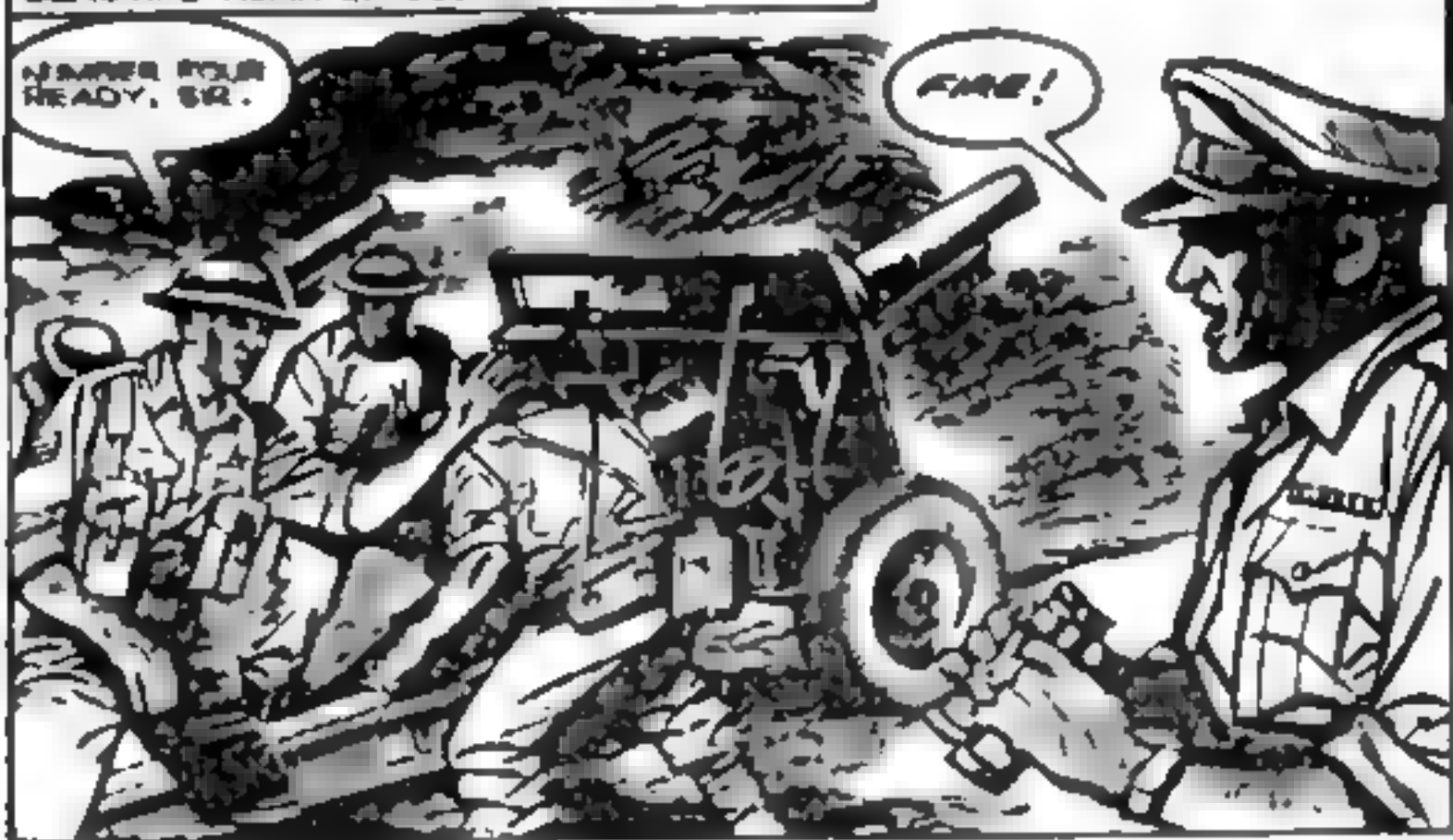




MEN SWEATED AS THEY SERVED THEIR GUNS, SLAMMING SHELLS HOME INTO THE BRECH, SHAPING QUICK COMMANDS AGAINST THE BLASTING ROAR OF SOUND.

NEARER FOUR  
READY, SIR.

FIRE!



SHELLS ADDED SKYWARD IN AN UPWARD HURRY, PLUNGING DOWN ON THE GERMAN LINES WITH DEVASTATING EFFECT.



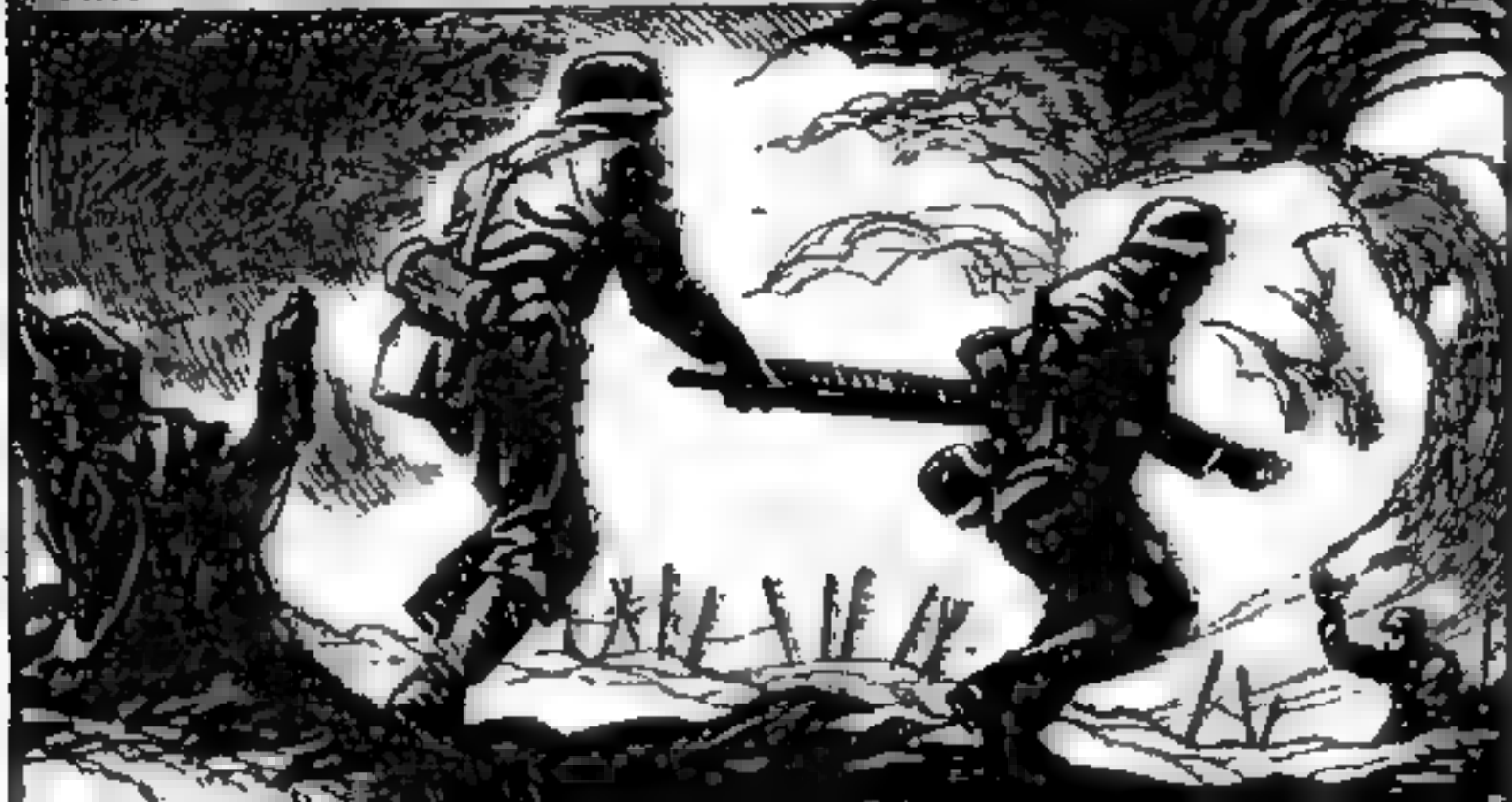


THOSE WHO DIED WERE THE LUCKY ONES. OTHERS, THEIR BODIES TORN BY THE IMPACT OF EXPLOSIVE FURY, WERE NOT SO LUCKY.

HELP ME!  
HELP ME!



A STRETCHER PARTY MOVED FORWARD BUT THE BLIND SHELLS DROPPING FROM ABOVE COULD NOT CHOOSE THEIR TARGETS.





THERE WAS A BLINDING FLASH AND WHITE-HOT SHRAPNEL LAINED FROM THE CENTRE OF THE EXPLOSION. IN THAT TERRIBLE BARRAGE, AN ERRAND OF MERCY WAS NO SAFEGUARD FROM SUDDEN DEATH...



WAITING BEHIND THE BARRAGE, THE BRITISH INFANTRY CROUCHED ON THE SCARRED GROUND, READY TO PUSH FORWARD AND BEAT DOWN THE STUBBORN GERMAN RESISTANCE.

STEADY, LADS  
SAFETY CATCHES  
OFF...





THE BARRAGE CEASED AND THE INFANTRY RUSHED FORWARD. NAKED STEEL GLITTERED EVILLY IN THE BRIEF GLARE OF EXPLOSIONS. BULLETS BEGAN TO RIP THROUGH THEIR RANKS, THINNING THEM WITH EVERY YARD COVERED.

GET 'EM, LADS!  
GIVE 'EM HELL!



BATTERED THOUGH THEY HAD BEEN BY THE BARRAGE, THE ENEMY FOUGHT BACK SAVAGELY.

THE SWINE!  
WILL THEY NEVER  
STOP COMING?





A GRENADE SOARED IN ITS ARC, DROPPING WITH DEADLY ACCURACY ON THE SPANDAU POST -- BUT THE THROWER WAS MORTALLY HIT EVEN AS IT LEFT HIS HAND.



THE BRITISH ATTACK ROLLED POWERFULLY FORWARD AND, TO THE WEARY GERMAN DEFENSES, IT SEEMED THAT NOTHING COULD STOP IT.





CARL HCHMANN RAN HIS HAND OVER HIS RED RIMMED EYES, STRIVING TO BRING HIS TIRED BRAIN TO GRASP WITH THIS NEW REVERSE. FOR DAYS, WEEKS, THEY HAD SUFFERED CONTINUOUS BOMBARDMENT AND ATTACK. HOW MUCH LONGER COULD THEY CLING TO THEIR POSITIONS?

BUT THAT GROUND *MUST* BE RETAKEN. WE WILL LAUNCH A COUNTER-ATTACK AT MIDNIGHT.



BUT---  
JA, HERR  
HAUPTMANN.

CARL CAUGHT THE MOMENTARY HESITATION AND HE TURNED ANGRILY TO THE FELDWEBEL.

YOU THINK SUCH AN ORDER IS HARD, EH? WE ARE SOLDIERS OF THE REICH, VOGEL-- OUR DUTY IS TO DEFEAT THE ENEMY. IT IS THE AGONY TO HOLD ANY OTHER THOUGHT. NOW OBEY MY ORDERS!



VOGEL WAS NO TRAITOR, BUT HUMAN FLESH AND BLOOD CAN STAND ONLY SO MUCH. HE WAS AN OLD SOLDIER AND STUBBORN. NOT EVEN ORDERS COULD MAKE HIS THOUGHTS PLEASANT ONES.



ANOTHER ATTACK? IMMEL! HOW MUCH MORE MUST WE STAND? DOES HE WANT TO KILL US ALL?



SECONDS TO MIDNIGHT, THE FURY OF THE BRITISH ATTACK HAD SUBSIDED. CROUCHED AT THE HEAD OF HIS MEN, CARL STARED INTO THE DARKNESS ...

READY, NOW! THE MORTARS WILL OPEN FIRE IN A MOMENT, WE ATTACK BEHIND THEIR COVER.



SAFETY CATCHES CLICKED OFF, THE MORTARS LOUGHED THEIR SPITEFUL BARK AND BOMBS BOARDED HIGH INTO THE AIR TOWARDS THE ALLIED LINES.

FORWARD!





## Lucky Strike

CAPTAIN SINCLAR HAD EXPECTED SUCH AN ATTACK. EVEN AS THE GERMANS ADVANCED, HIS OWN MORTARS SPOUTED STAR SHELLS INTO THE SKY...

HERE THEY COME. I MUST SAY THEIR COMMANDER, WHOEVER HE IS, HAS PLenty OF GUTS.

I BET HIS MEN WOULD HAVE A LITTLE LESS, SR. ALL HE'S REALLY DOING IS LEADING THEM TO THE SLAUGHTER.

SLAUGHTER IT WAS. SINCLAR SAW NO GLORY IN WASTING THE LIVES OF HIS MEN. BEHIND HIM, FIELD GUNS ROARED AS HE GAVE THE WORD





CARL'S BLOOD RAN COLD AS THE SCREAM OF FALLING SHELLS REACHED HIS EARS — HIS ENEMY WAS ALERT AND PREPARED. VOYPL, TOO, KNEW THE FURY OF DESTRUCTION THAT WAS HEADING THEIR WAY.



THE WHOLE ASSAULT FRONT BECAME AN AREA OF BURSTING SHELLS AS 5-A THOUSAND TINY VULCANES WERE ERUPTING SIMULTANEOUSLY. OUTLINED STARKLY AGAINST THE CLANK WERE THE LIMB HOOKIES OF THOSE WHO WERE HIT BY THE SHRAPNEL.





VOGEL'S ORDERS HAD BEEN WRONG. CARL KNEW THEIR ONLY CHANCE WAS TO RUN BENEATH THE BARRAGE, TOWARDS THE WAITING ENEMY.



SINCLAIR COULD HARDLY BELIEVE HIS EYES. HE HAD EXPECTED THE GERMANS TO RETREAT AND HERE THEY WERE ADVANCING RIGHT THROUGH THE CURTAIN OF RED-HOT STEEL.





A SPATTERING OF FIRE FROM THE GERMANS' AUTOMATIC WEAPONS BEGAN TO REACH THE BRITISH LINES. SINCLAIR RAPPED SWIFT ORDERS AND SUDDENLY THOSE LINES BLASTED INTO MURDEROUS LIFE.

COME ON,  
JERRY! COME  
AND GET IT!  
THE MORE THE  
MERRIER!



THE RAIL OF LEAD SCYTHED THE GERMAN ADVANCE AND THEIR LINES WAVERED AND SUDDENLY BROKE. THEY COULD TAKE NO MORE. IN BLIND PANIC, THEY BLUNDERED BACK THE WAY THEY HAD COME.

COME BACK, YOU  
COWARDLY SWINE!  
COME BACK!





THEY HAD RUN AWAY! CARL SCREAMED AFTER THEM. HIS WORDS LOST IN THE CHATTER OF GUNS. THEN HE KNEW NO MORE.



BUT A FEW MOMENTS LATER, THE GERMAN OFFICER CAME TO HIS SENSES AGAIN. HE FELT AS IF HIS HEAD HAD BEEN HIT BY A HAMMER.

I'M ALIVE  
MUST HAVE  
BEEN A  
GLASSING BLOW  
I MUST GET  
BACK -- TO  
REJOIN MY  
COMMAND.





CARL BEGAN TO CRAWL TOWARDS HIS OWN  
LOOPS -- THEN HEARD THE CHEERS OF A  
WITTED MAN. "SOMETIME, HE DRAGGED  
THE MAN ACROSS HIS SHOULDERS

HELP ME!  
HELP...

STEADY  
LAD, YOU  
CAN BE  
SAFE

FROM HIS POSITION, CARL SAW THE LONG, BURNING FIRE STREAMERS  
AWAY INTO THE DARKNESS. HE WAS A MAN WHO COULD RESIST PHAETRY,  
EVEN IN AN ENEMY.

CEASE FIRE!  
ALL WEAPONS  
CEASE FIRE!

YOU WERE  
RIGHT, FOR  
THAT FIRST  
COMMANDER  
HAD SAID THAT  
RIGHT FIRST!  
HE MAKES  
IT.



CARL MADE IT. HE STAGGERED BACK TO HIS SHATTERED COMMAND WHERE SHAMEFACED MEN TOOK CHARGE OF HIS BURDEN. FRESH ORDERS HAD JUST ARRIVED

ORDERS FROM GENERAL OBERVELT HIMSELF, HERR HAUPTMANN. THE DESPATCH RIDER SAYS THEY ARE URGENT.



CARL HAD HOPED FOR ORDERS TO RETREAT -- BUT WHAT HE READ TURNED HIS HEART TO STONE.

DO WE  
RETREAT, HERR  
HAUPTMANN?



THESE  
ARE DIRECT  
ORDERS FROM  
GENERAL  
OBERVELT OF  
THE S.S., VOGEL.  
WE ARE ORDERED  
TO ATTACK  
IMMEDIATELY  
AND FIGHT TO  
THE LAST MAN.



CARL HEARD HIS MEN'S SHARP INTAKE OF BREATH AND EVEN TOUGH OLD VOGEL BLANCHED. HUMAN FLESH AND BLOOD CAN STAND ONLY SO MUCH AND THESE MEN HAD REACHED THEIR LIMIT.

HERR  
HAUPTMANN--THE  
MEN - THEY  
ARE WORN OUT,  
WOUNDED, WE  
WOULDN'T  
STAND A  
CHANCE. I BEG  
YOU... DON'T  
ASK THIS OF  
US.

THE ORDER  
WAS A MISTAKE,  
FELDWEBEL. WE  
WILL WITHDRAW.

GENERAL OBERVELT HAD BEEN DEFIED. HE HAD DEMANDED A VICTORY AND HAD BEEN GIVEN A DEFEAT. HIS FURY BURST ON THE HEAD OF HAUPTMANN CARL HICHMANN WHO, A FEW DAYS LATER, FOUND HIMSELF SUMMARILY ACCUSED.

YOU REFUSED TO  
OBEY AN ORDER!  
YOU RETREATED  
IN THE FACE OF  
THE ENEMY! YOU  
ARE GUILTY OF  
OUTRIGHT  
COWARDICE AND  
THE PENALTY  
IS DEATH!

TELL US,  
HICHMANN,  
WHY DID YOU  
DO THIS  
THING?





TIGHT-LIPPED, CARL TOLD THEM ALTHOUGH FELTSMEN UNDERSTOOD, THE EXPLANATION ONLY ENRAGED OVERVELT THE MORE

I WANT NONE  
OF YOUR EXCUSES  
YOU HAD MEN ---  
YOU HAD ARMS ---  
YOU HAD AN ENEMY.  
YOUR DUTY WAS TO  
ATTACK--BUT INSTEAD  
YOU RAN LIKE A  
COWARD.

BUT, HEER GENERAL, WHAT  
ELSE COULD I DO? IT  
WOULD HAVE BEEN WANTON,  
USELESS SLAUGHTER. TO  
RETREAT WAS THE  
ONLY THING  
I COULD DO  
OTHER THAN  
SURRENDER ANY  
ONE WOULD  
OFFER WOULD  
HAVE DONE THE  
SAME



THE GENERAL'S  
CHAIR OVERTURNED  
AS HE LUMBERED IN  
A FURY TO HIS FEET

SO! YOU CALL  
ME AN INEXPERIENCED  
OFFICER AND WONDER THE  
THRU WHICH IS TAKING  
TOO LONG TO WIN THIS  
WAR WITH COWARDS. LEAD  
THE SOLDIERS OF THE  
FATHERLAND THIS COURT  
FINDS YOU GUILTY  
THE SENTENCE IS  
DEATH!





TO THE YOUNG GERMAN, IT WAS LIKE AN EVIL NIGHTMARE. HE WAS LED OUTSIDE TO WHERE THE FIRING SQUAD WAITED AND OBLIXY FELTSHIEN WONDERED MISERABLY HOW HE WAS TO EXPLAIN CARL'S DEATH TO THE BOY'S FATHER...



CARL BIT HIS LIPS. HE HAD FACED GUNS BEFORE BUT NEVER LIKE THIS. HE FORCED HIMSELF TO ATTENTION, WONDERING WHY OVERVELT WAS DELAYING THE FINAL ORDER. ONLY A MIRACLE COULD SAVE HIM NOW...





OBERVELT HAD PARADED ALL AVAILABLE SOLDIERS TO WITNESS HIS POWER AND THE FACT THAT THEY DID NOT LIKE WHAT HE WAS DOING PLEASED HIM ALL THE MORE.



THE MIRACLE HAPPENED. & FOR GEORGE, ENGINES LABOURING, THUNDERED OVER THE SQUARE. OBERVELT, TERRIFIED AT THE SIGHT OF THE BOMBER, MADE A FRANTIC DIVE FOR COVER.





BUT IT WAS NOT AN ATTACK. THE GERMAN SOLDIERS REALISED IT ALMOST AT ONCE AND THEY ROSE SHEEPSHLY TO THEIR FEET. THEN, AT THE SIGHT OF GENERAL OBERVELT OF THE HATED 9 S., THEY DOUBLED UP IN HELPLESS LAUGHTER...

SILENCE! HOW DARE YOU LAUGH AT ME! SILENCE, I SAY! I WILL HAVE YOU ALL SHOT!



OBERVELT'S RAGE MADE HIM ALL THE MORE RIDICULOUS. THE LAUGHTER INCREASED. FELTSHEN, WIPING THE SMILE FROM HIS FACE, SAW HIS CHANCE...

AN AMUSING INCIDENT, GENERAL. IT WOULD INTEREST BERLIN TO LEARN HOW THE VERY MAN WHO WANTED AN OFFICER SHOT FOR SUPPOSED COWARDICE, PROVED HIMSELF SO BRAVE AT THE MERE SIGHT OF AN ENEMY BOMBER.

YOU--YOU WOULDN'T DARE!





FELTSHEN'S OFFER WAS PLAIN--HIS SILENCE FOR CARL'S LIFE. OBERVELT HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO AGREE. EARS BURNING AT THE SOUND OF LAUGHTER, HE FLUNG HIMSELF INTO HIS CAR.



FAR TO THE NORTH, G FOR GEORGE STRUGGLED FOR HEIGHT. CONNOR HAD ONLY CAUGHT A GLIMPER OF THE VILLAGE, ALL HIS ATTENTION WAS ON HIS PLANE. THE ENGINES WERE ROUGH AND HE WAS GETTING WORRIED.



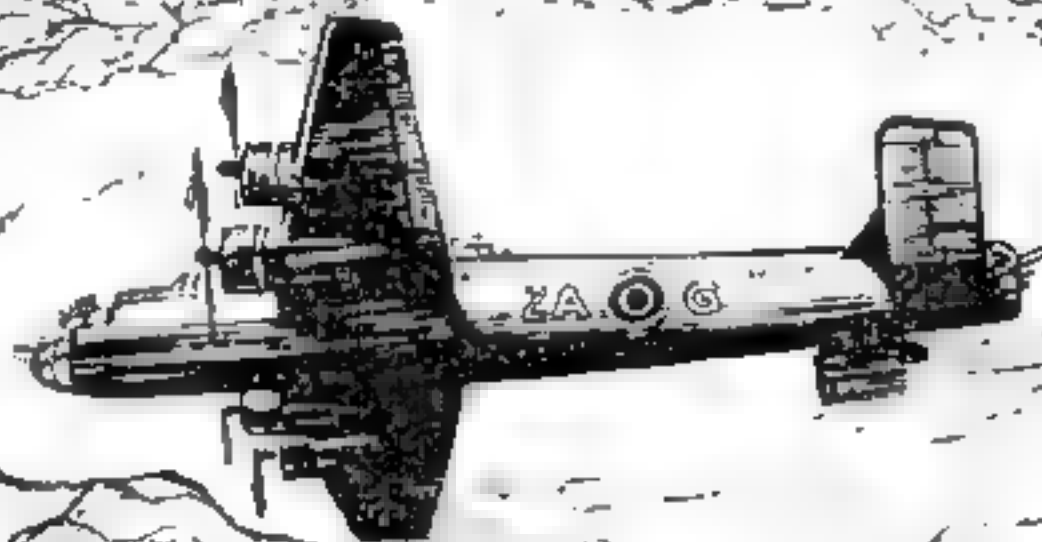


CONNOR SHOOK HIS HEAD THEY HAD A MISSION AND HE WAS GOING TO SEE IT THROUGH HE LOOKED DOWN TOWARDS THE GROUND.

NOT YET WE CAN ALWAYS DUMP THE LOAD IF THINGS GET TOO BAD, WE MIGHT EVEN SPOT ANOTHER ODD JERRY FOR EDWARDS TO PRANG

WE JUST PASSED A VILLAGE FULL OF 'EM. NICE PLACE. IT MIGHT BE AN IDEA TO HAVE A HOLIDAY THERE WHEN THIS LOT'S ALL OVER.

CONNOR GRINNED AND EASED THE BOMBER UPWARDS THE ENGINES ROARED AND SENT ECHOES FROM THE RUGGED HILLS BELOW. ROUGH COUNTRY, THE KIND THE PARTISANS LOVED FROM THEIR SECRET HIDE-OUTS THEY WAGED WAR AGAINST THEIR HATED GERMAN ALLIES.





## Chapter 4.

## THE PROMISE

A DETACHMENT OF GERMAN SOLDIERS DESCENDED UPON A SMALL HILL FARM, DEMANDING FOOD AND SHELTER. THEIR ARROGANT OFFICER'S ORDERS BROOKED NO REFUSAL FROM THE AGED FARMER.

YOU WILL BULLET MY MEN. THEY ARE TO HAVE THE BEST FOOD, THE BEST WINE, THE BEST OF EVERYTHING. YOU UNDERSTAND?

SI IT WILL BE AN HONOUR.



OLD VITTORIO WAS INNOCENT AND EAGER TO PLEASE, BUT AS TIME WENT ON AND THE GERMANS ATE AND DRANK AND DID NOT PAY HE GREW WORRIED. TIMIDLY HE SPOKE TO THE OFFICER.

PLEASE I HAVE NO MORE FOOD, NO MORE WINE. YOU WILL PAY ME NOW, YES?

PAY YOU? ARE YOU MAD? WE ARE HERE TO PROTECT YOU. YOU SHOULD PAY US. LET ME HAVE NO MORE TALK OF THIS KIND.





THE GERMANS WERE LIKE WOLVES. THEY ATE HIS FARM BARE AND DEMANDED ENDLESS QUANTITIES OF WINE. FINALLY, WHEN HE COULD FEED THEM NO LONGER, THEY GREW UGLY.

I HAVE NOTHING. I TELL YOU, NOTHING YOU HAVE EATEN IT ALL. HOW CAN I BUY FOOD UNLESS YOU PAY ME.

I KNOW YOU FARMERS, YOU'RE ALL THE SAME WHY DON'T YOU USE SOME OF THAT MONEY YOU'VE GOT HIDDEN AWAY?

THAT'S AN IDEA. LET'S MAKE HIM TELL US WHERE IT IS.

VITTORIO HAD NO MONEY BUT THE GERMANS DID NOT WANT TO RELIEVE THAT. THEY WERE DRUNK AND VICIOUS, SPOILING FOR TROUBLE. FRIGHTENED, VITTORIO MADE A DASH FOR THE DOOR.

GRAB THE OLD FOX AND THROW HIM BACK HERE. WE'LL SOON MAKE HIM TALK.





VITTORIO WAS OLD AND FRAIL. THE GERMANS WERE STRONG. THEY PICKED HIM UP AND FLUNG HIM BOOPLY DOWN THE ROOM. HE SCREAMED AS HE STRUCK AGAINST THE BIG LAMP.



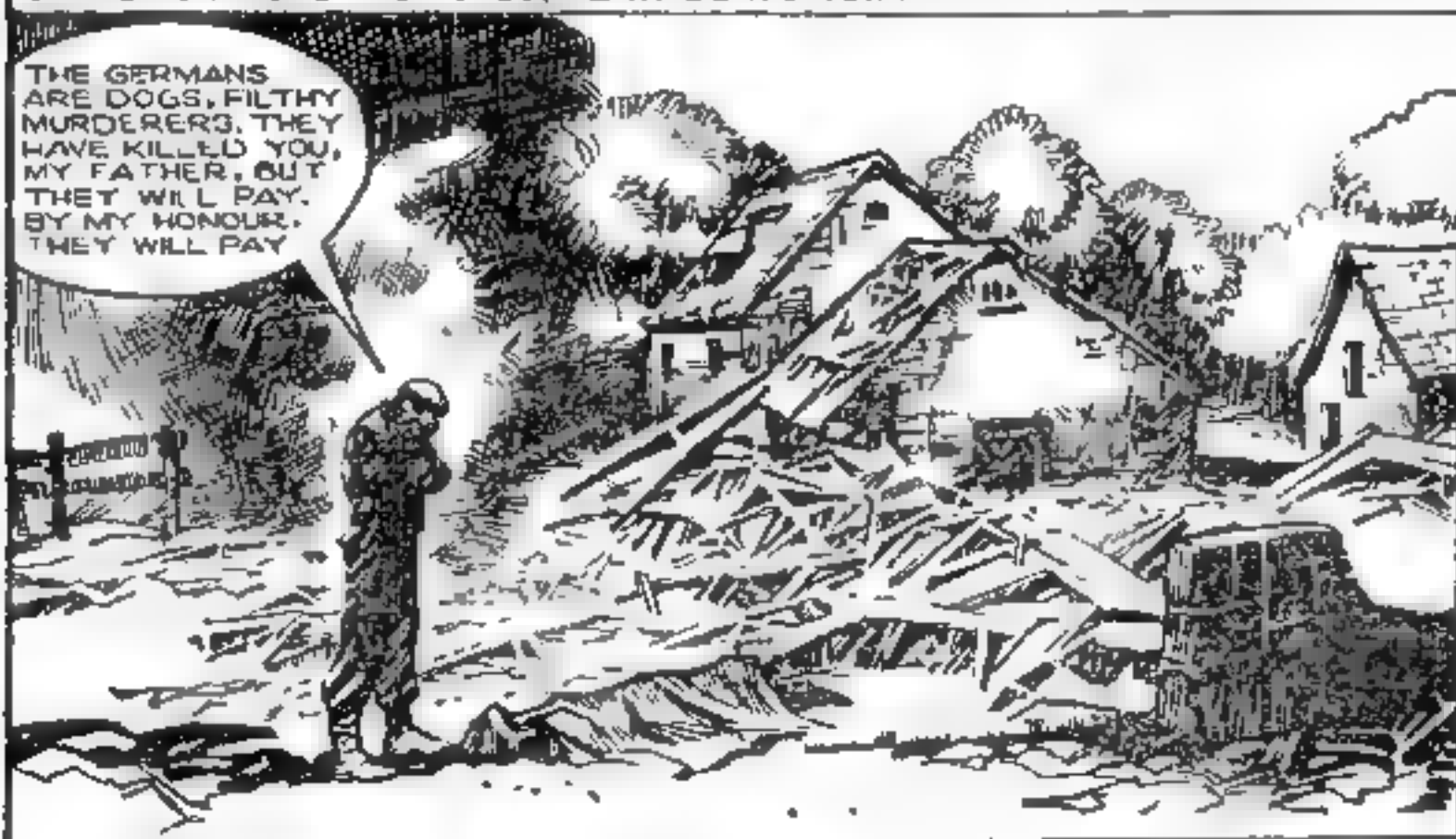
THE LAMP BURST, COVERING THE ROOM WITH FLAMING OIL. FLAMES LICKED AT THE DRY WOOD AND IN SECONDS THE ROOM WAS AN INFERNO FRANTICALLY, THE GERMANS RACED FOR THE DOOR, VITTORIO COULD NOT RUN ..





THE GERMANS ESCAPED BUT THE OLD MAN DID NOT. ON HIS WAY HOME FROM THE VILLAGE GIUSEPPE, HIS SON, SAW THE RED GLOW IN THE SKY. LATER, STANDING AMONG THE ASHES, HE MADE HIS VOW.

THE GERMANS ARE DOGS, FILTHY MURDERERS. THEY HAVE KILLED YOU, MY FATHER, BUT THEY WILL PAY. BY MY HONOUR, THEY WILL PAY.



THEY PAID IN SMALL WAYS AT FIRST AND THEN, AS GIUSEPPE'S BAND OF PARTISANS GREW STRONGER, HIS BLOWS BECAME MORE VIOLENT.





THE GERMANS GREW TO HATE THE WILL-OF-THE-WISP WHO STRUCK AND VANISHED ONLY TO STRIKE AGAIN.



BUT THE WAR DRAGGED ON. THE GERMANS SEEMED STRONGER THAN BEFORE AND MUTTERINGS OF DISCONTENT REACHED GUISEPPE'S EARS.

THIS IS DANGEROUS, GUISEPPE. THE GERMANS ARE TOO STRONG. WE DO NOT STAND A CHANCE AGAINST THEM.

THIS FROM YOU, LUIGI? ARE YOU GETTING OLD THAT YOU HESITATE?





GIUSEPPE GRINNED AS HE SPOKE BUT HE WAS WORRIED HE HAD PLANNED TO ATTACK A HEAVY CONCENTRATION OF GERMAN SUPPLIES BUT HE NEEDED THE FULL CO-OPERATION OF EVERY MAN.

LUKE IS RIGHT, GO SLOW. THIS THING YOU PLAN -- IT IS TOO BIG FOR US.

WE ALL HATE THE GERMANS, GIUSEPPE, BUT WE MUST HAVE SENSE. WE CANNOT FIGHT A WAR ON OUR OWN.

GIUSEPPE WAS A SELF-TAUGHT FIGHTER WHO KNEW ONLY ONE THING. HE HATED THE GERMANS AND HAD SWORN TO KILL THEM. HE GLARED AT HIS MEN, HOT WORDS SPILLING FROM HIS LIPS.

ARE YOU MEN THAT YOU TALK SO? EVERY SOLDIER WE KILL, EVERY BULLET THAT DOES NOT REACH THE FRONT, EVERY TRUCK WE DESTROY IS A BLOW FOR FREEDOM TONIGHT I ATTACK DO I ATTACK ALONE?



THAT NIGHT GIUSEPPE STRUCK. LIKE GHOSTS, THE PARTISANS CREEPT TOWARDS THE GERMAN CENTRES, AND COLD STEEL FOUND ITS MARK.





QUICKLY THE PARTS BAND MOVED TOWARDS THE TRUCK. IT WOULD, THOUGHT LUCI, BE A MISTAKE THE GERMANS WOULD REMEMBER HIS FACE FELL AS LUCI HISSED FROM THE DARKNESS.

GUNTERPE!  
THESE TRUCKS  
ARE EMPTY!

YOU MUST  
BE WRONG!  
THAT



HIS WORDS DIED AS GUNTREPE SLICKED THE NIGHT. FROM THE DARK SUPPOSE, A LOADED WITH AMMUNITION CAME THE SEARING LANCES OF HOT TRUCKS.

IT IS A  
TRAP! RUN!





DESPERATELY, THEY RAN FOR THE SHELTER OF THE WOODS. SICKNESS GRIPPED GUISEPPE'S STOMACH AS HE REALISED WHAT HAD HAPPENED.

THEY WERE WAITING FOR US. THIS TIME THEY INTEND TO WIPE US OUT. WE HAVEN'T A CHANCE.



THE GERMANS HAD PLANNED WELL. THE PARTISANS WERE DRIVEN TOWARDS THE FOOTHILLS WHERE THEY WERE SURROUNDED. CALMLY THE GERMANS WAITED FOR DAYLIGHT BEFORE MOVING IN FOR THE KILL.

I WAS RIGHT, GUISEPPE. THEY WERE TOO STRONG FOR US. NOW THEY WILL KILL US ALL.

HOW CLOSE ARE THEY NOW?





THEIR ARMoured CARS FILLED THE PASS. FROM ALL SIDES THE GERMANS ADVANCED ON THE SMALL BAND. IF THEY TRIED TO RUN, THE ARMoured CARS WOULD RIP THEM TO SHREDS WITH MACHINE-GUN FIRE.

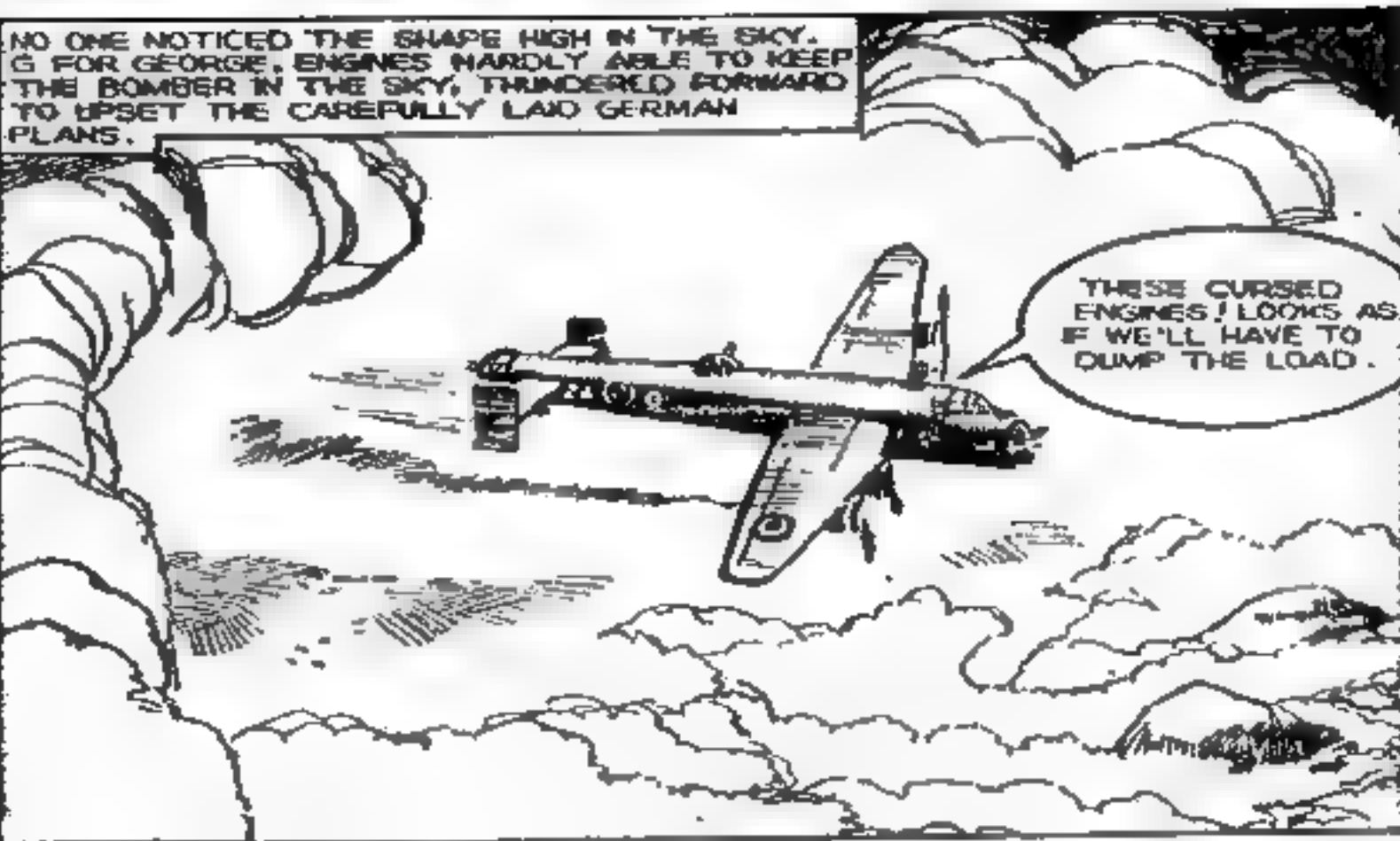
THE MORTAR CREW IS ALMOST IN POSITION. IN A SHORT WHILE NOW WE SHALL HAVE WIPE-OUT THESE SCUM. THERE IS TO BE NO QUARTER.

JAWOHL, HERR HAUPTMANN.



NO ONE NOTICED THE SHAPE HIGH IN THE SKY. G FOR GEORGE, ENGINES HARDLY ABLE TO KEEP THE BOMBER IN THE SKY, THUNDERED FORWARD TO UPSET THE CAREFULLY LAID GERMAN PLANS.

THESE CURSED ENGINES! LOOKS AS IF WE'LL HAVE TO DUMP THE LOAD.





CONNOR HAD DONE HIS BEST BUT NOT EVEN HIS SKILL COULD PROVIDE THE MISSING POWER. IN ORDER TO STAY IN THE AIR, G FOR GEORGE HAD TO BE LIGHTENED. THE ONLY WAY WAS TO DITCH THE BOMBS.

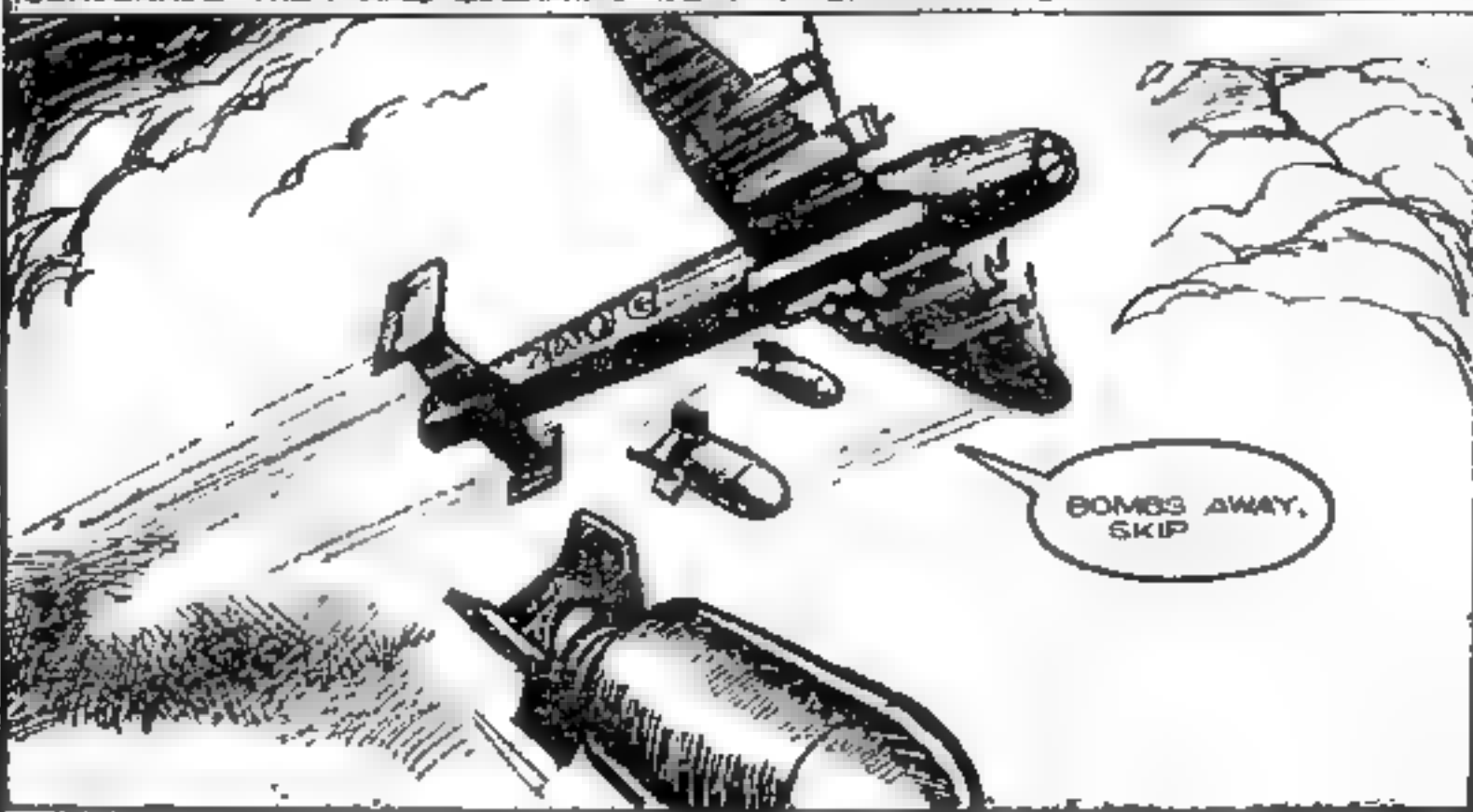


PILOT TO  
BOMB AIMER  
DITCH THE  
BOMBS.

RIGHT,  
SKIP

ABOUT AS  
USELESS A PLACE  
TO DUMP THEM  
AS THE JERRIES  
COULD WISH.

AS THE BOMBS FELL AWAY THE PLANE ROSE SHARPLY INTO THE SKY. NO ONE BOTHERED TO WATCH THE FALL OF THE BOMBS. AS FAR AS THE CREW WERE CONCERNED THEY HAD BEEN WASTED ON A BARREN ITALIAN MOUNTAINSIDE



BOMBS AWAY,  
SKIP



BUT THE BOMBS WERE NOT WASTED. INSTEAD OF HITTING A BARREN MOUNTAINSIDE THEY PLUNGED DIRECTLY INTO THE ASSEMBLED ARMoured CARS



THE ROARING THUNDER OF THE EXPLOSION ECHOED ROUND THE HILLS. GIUSEPPE STARTED DOWN AT DR. HOLOCAUST, HARDLY DARING TO BELIEVE HIS EYES



WE ARE SAVED!  
THIS IS OUR CHANCE  
QUICKLY NOW!  
FOLLOW ME



THEY WASTED NO TIME. THE GERMANS WERE STILL IN THE H.I.S. BUT THE PASS WAS CLEAR. THEY RALLIED DOWN IT TOWARDS GALTBY.



FREE OF ITS LOAD OF BOMBS, G FOR GEORGE ROARED ONWARDS TOWARDS THE COLLING BRIDGE. THEY COULD NOT BOMB IT BUT THEY COULD AT LEAST PHOTOGRAPH IT.

ANY POINT IN CONTINUING NOW, SKIP?

WE'RE TOO NEAR TO TURN BACK NOW. INTELLIGENCE WILL WANT A PHOTOGRAPH AND WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO STRIKE THEM UP A LITTLE.





IT WAS NOT LONG BEFORE THE COLLENO BRIDGE CAME IN SIGHT. DISGUSTED SOUNDS CAME FROM THE CREW.

THERE SHE IS,  
BOYS, AND AS  
GOOD AS NEW.

THEY BUILD IT  
UP AND WE KNOCK  
IT DOWN. THEN THEY  
BUILD IT UP AGAIN.  
JUST A WASTE  
OF TIME.

CONNOR CIRCLED THE BRIDGE. CAMERAS CLICKING, THEN HEADED BACK HOME. IT HAD BEEN A WASTED MISSION. EVERYONE THOUGHT~~ THERE WAS NOT EVEN A TARGET IN SIGHT TO MACHINE-GUN...

HOW ABOUT TAKING  
ANOTHER CIRCLE, SKIP?  
MAYBE I CAN FIND A  
REAL LIVE JERRY TO  
STRAFE.

NO POINT IN  
WASTING AMMO.  
JUST RELAX AND  
ENJOY THE VIEW.



DISAPPOINTED, EDWARDS SETTLED BACK AND TRIED TO MAKE HIMSELF COMFORTABLE. IN THE NOSE, CONNOR ADJUSTED HIS ENGINES AND TURNED BACK WITH A WARY EYE ON HIS INSTRUMENTS. BEHIND HIM, THE NAVIGATOR EXPRESSED HIS DISGUST.

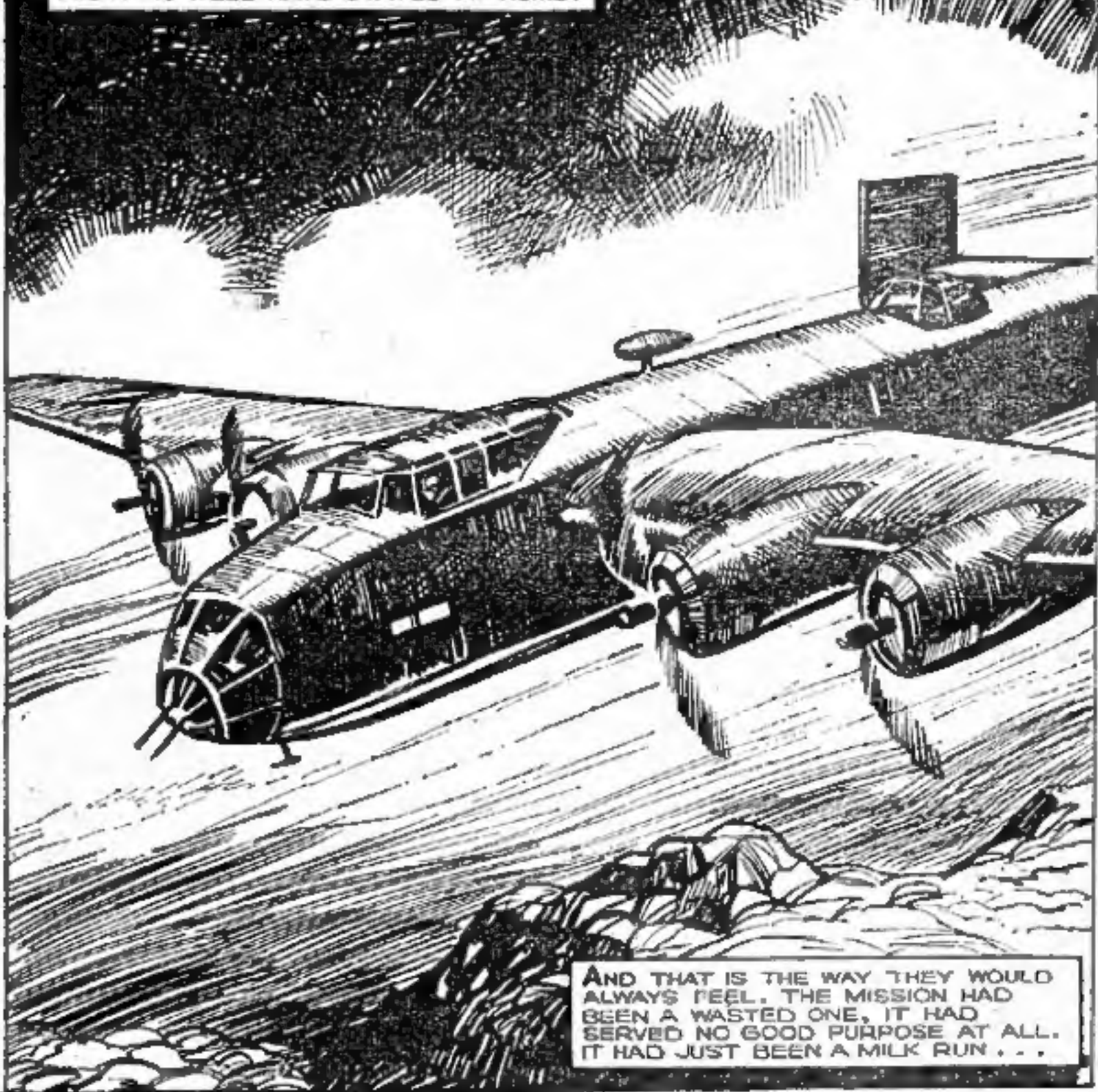


CONNOR SMILED BUT LEFT IT TO THE CO-PILOT TO SPEAK. THE CREW WERE DISAPPOINTED AND IT WOULD DO NO HARM FOR THEM TO GET IT OFF THEIR CHESTS.





ONE BY ONE THE REST OF THE CREW ECHOED THE SAME FEELING. CONNOR COULD GUESS HOW THEY FELT. FOR ALL THE GOOD THEY HAD DONE THEY MIGHT AS WELL HAVE STAYED AT HOME.



AND THAT IS THE WAY THEY WOULD ALWAYS FEEL. THE MISSION HAD BEEN A WASTED ONE, IT HAD SERVED NO GOOD PURPOSE AT ALL. IT HAD JUST BEEN A MILK RUN . . .

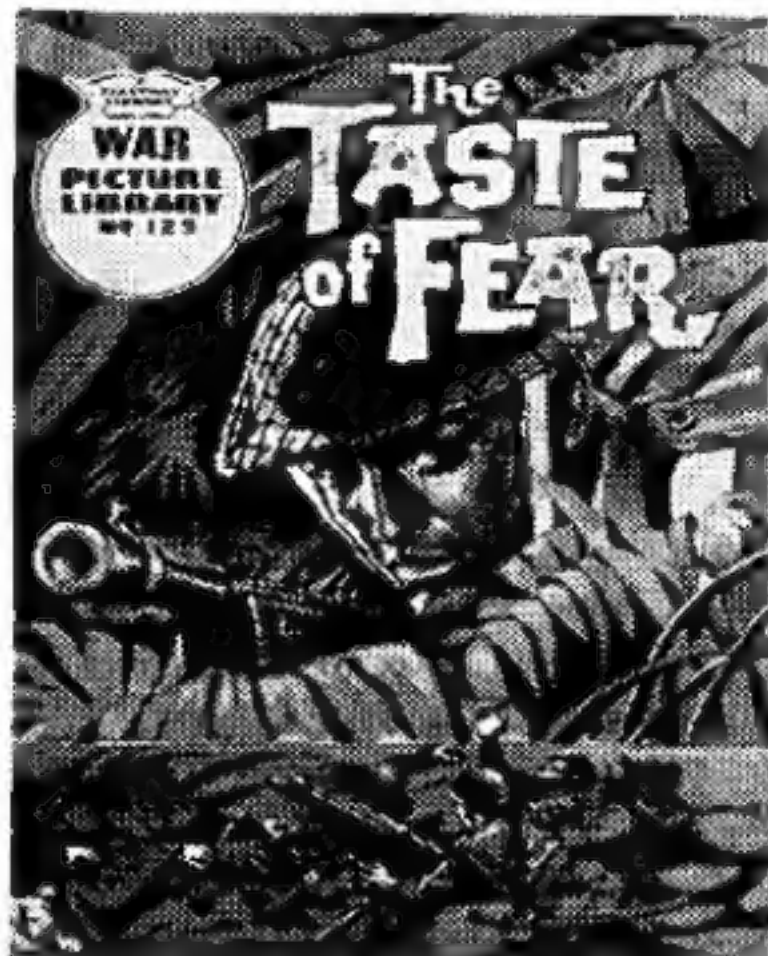


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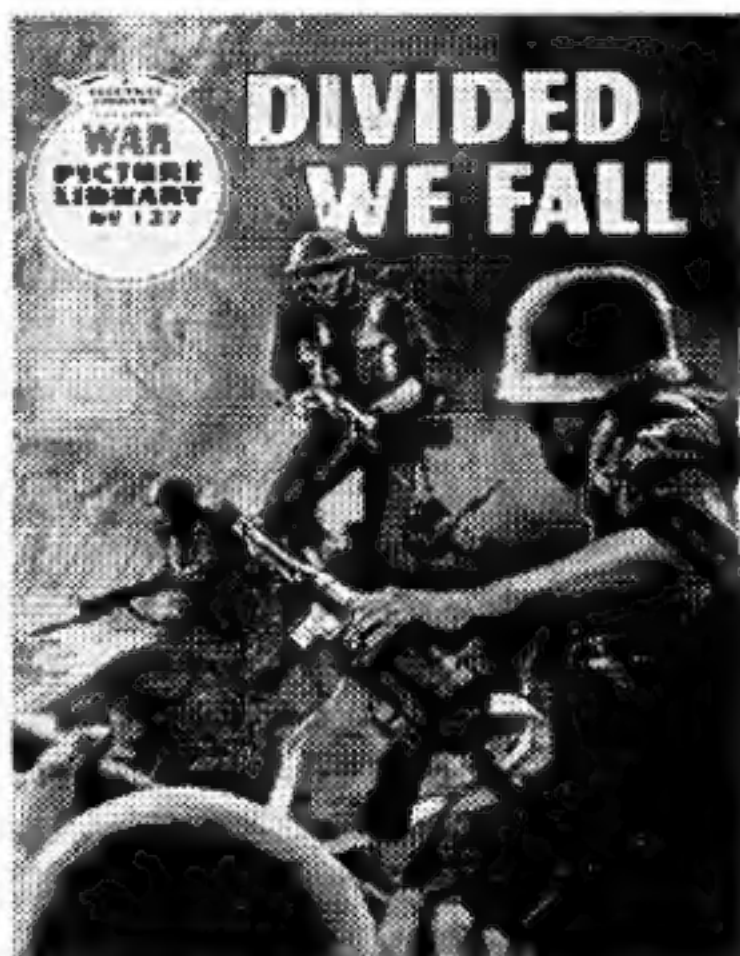
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